

# **TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN**

## **Thesis Booklet**

Eötvös Loránd University  
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PhD Programme in Language Pedagogy

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 The research in context**

The problem of disadvantaged children is of major importance in Hungary. Children regarded as disadvantaged have a home background which is usually characterized by the conjunction of several factors. Most of the disadvantaged children suffer multiple and overlapping disadvantages. Unemployment, unfavourable circumstances and undereducation appear to be inherited from generation to generation. The only way out of this vicious circle seems to be access to quality education.

Hungary is one of the countries in which different background characteristics are reported to influence student performance to a critical extent. Furthermore, educational attainment correlates strongly with job prospects in Hungary. The role of foreign language learning is crucial as it may change the future life chances of people in the labour market and help them to break from the cycle of poverty.

Teaching foreign languages to disadvantaged children is a neglected area of language pedagogy: although there is an abundant literature concerning disadvantaged children, there appears to be an obvious research gap in this area. Educational studies usually focus on general problems concerning disadvantaged children, for example minority children in schools, equality of opportunities in education, segregation, school performance of disadvantaged children, alternative schools and programs, or characteristics of efficient schools, while research into learning foreign languages has been disregarded so far. The important role that foreign languages play in the shaping of young people's futures makes it necessary to investigate the foreign language teaching situation in schools with a substantial number of disadvantaged children.

For children coming from economically disadvantaged families the only context of instruction, the primary school is essential as school may well be their only chance to learn

foreign languages. The main task for schools of disadvantaged children is to create the conditions for demanding and meaningful learning and intellectual achievement, including the opportunity to learn a foreign language effectively, regardless of minority group, geographic location, socioeconomic status or disability.

It is a direct consequence of the above considerations that I decided to focus my PhD work on the investigation of foreign language learning of disadvantaged children. First a number of small-scale, preliminary studies were carried out. The aims of this research and the applied tools were developed on the basis of the findings of three previous research projects (Furcsa, 2005; Furcsa, 2008; Furcsa, Borogdai and Cserhalmi, 2005) conducted by the writer. The results of those preliminary investigations all fed into the research presented in the main body of this dissertation and led to the formulation of new research questions that the dissertation will try to answer.

## **1.2 Purpose of the research**

The aim of the study I conducted for my PhD is to identify the major problems faced by disadvantaged foreign language learners and their teachers, and to build up a detailed and comprehensive picture, as it is perceived from the inside by both the children and their teachers in the Hungarian context. This research will improve our understanding of the multiple levels of disadvantage in education and, on the theoretical level, contribute to the literature on the relation between language disadvantage, native language and foreign language learning.

On the practical level, the pedagogical implications of the present research are important as the findings could be built into the curriculum of primary school teacher training. My experience as a teacher trainer has drawn attention to the importance of the idea that understanding the characteristics of disadvantaged children and becoming familiar with

efficient teaching techniques can help beginner or even practicing teachers to develop expertise in teaching disadvantaged children.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The present study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do language teachers see the process and nature of teaching foreign languages to socially disadvantaged children?
2. What factors do teachers consider to influence the process and the result of foreign language teaching in a socially disadvantaged class?
3. How do children from socially disadvantaged families relate to foreign language learning in primary schools?

The answers to the research questions will outline a complex view of learning situations of disadvantaged children investigated from both pedagogic and social aspects. In order to present an as complete picture as possible, the language learning process is investigated from the aspects of disadvantaged children and the teachers of a foreign language; moreover, the viewpoints of the head teachers of the schools are also included.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of the present research is multi-disciplinary: issues of minority pedagogy, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics are integrated. The theoretical background is presented in eight sections. The first section describes the importance of social context in foreign language teaching and critical pedagogy. The second examines the definition of the term ‘disadvantaged’ as used in this study and the decisive factors that contribute to being disadvantaged. Two subsections try to clarify the differences between disadvantaged and such concepts as ‘children with special learning needs’ and ‘endangered

children.’ The subsequent sections review six aspects of disadvantaged situation found relevant: 1) the economic and legal aspect, 2) the ethnic aspect, 3) aspects of language disadvantage, 4) linguistic socialization and communicative style, 5) aspects of literacy and 6) motivation. My intention was to create a discourse of current thoughts and practices related to a disadvantaged situation in Hungary in which to contextualize the research project.

## **2.1 Sociocultural perspectives on language learning**

The context in which foreign language is learnt and taught is receiving substantial attention in research, but it is only recently that the significance of the social context has been placed at the centre of attention. The sociocultural perspectives on language teaching emphasize the context in which the language learners are situated, and the physical and symbolic tools of their interactions (Gebhard, 1999). This direction of language pedagogy views second language acquisition (SLA) as an institutional phenomenon shaped by cultures and structures embedded in the educational system.

Sociocultural theories of language pedagogy have been strongly influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978). The main idea from the perspective of the present study is that language learners are not seen as isolated individuals in the classroom and the role of social settings is essential. The children’s social and cultural context of home and school setting influence learning significantly.

The critical pedagogy approach views language education in relation to issues of social equality and focuses on issues concerning the power relations of participants (Davies, 2007). The assumptions of critical pedagogy have been applied to language teaching and refer to an attitude which relates the foreign language classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education (Akbari, 2008). The sociocultural views on language education addresses the question of whether English is implicated in the

reproduction of social inequalities has to be addressed. All children deserve equal access to demanding, meaningful learning and intellectual achievement, including the opportunity to learn a foreign language, regardless of ethnic group, socioeconomic status or disability. This consideration leads to the question of who can be regarded as disadvantaged in the Hungarian education system.

## **2.2 Defining 'disadvantaged'**

When discussing the issue of disadvantage in education, it is of major importance to define the key term *disadvantaged* as used in the present study first, in order to establish a common understanding of how this term is viewed and interpreted in its complexity. The complexity of this term is demonstrated through the presentation of recent perspectives on the issues of disadvantaged children in the current Hungarian educational context.

Disadvantaged situations cannot be defined by precise and unambiguous criteria. They are connected to unemployment, social deprivation, poor health and nutrition conditions leading to short life expectancy, frequent use of social and mental health services, and numerous occurrences of criminal behaviour (Ginsborg, 2006). There are several factors which interrelate and generate conditions that place children at risk of failing to achieve their intellectual and academic potential. In education studies, *socioeconomic status* is a frequently used objective indicator, however there is no strong agreement on the conceptual meaning of socioeconomic status and it is usually operationalized through several measures. In this approach, the following indicators usually influence the socioeconomic status of a child: parental employment status, parental educational attainment, especially parental early school leaver status, parental income level and medical card possession (Eivers, Shiel and Shortt, 2004).

The dissertation reviews the different factors which were found to be decisive in identifying groups of disadvantaged children in several Hungarian and international research studies, and a detailed characterization of disadvantaged children is also presented. The terminological differences between disadvantaged children and two similar categories: children with special learning needs and endangered children are clarified.

## **2.2 Economic and legal aspects**

When talking about the economic aspects of a disadvantaged situation, the main issue is child poverty. Child poverty in Hungary is strongly influenced by geographical factors and ethnic factors. There is no doubt that poverty seems to be one of the most influential risk factors for school failure as “the multiple stressors of poverty limit children’s readiness for and ability to succeed” (Knitzer and Koball, 2007, p. 686). There are two explanations given in research literature for the effects of poverty on school failure (Conley, 2005). The first explanation concentrates on the *material deprivation* aspect. The second explanation given for the effects of poverty on school failure is called *the parenting stress hypothesis* and “sees low income, variable employment, a lack of cultural resources and a feeling of inferiority from relative social class comparisons as exacerbating household stress levels which, in turn, lead to detrimental parenting practices such as yelling, shouting and hitting” (Conley, 2005, p. 334).

The legal definitions of disadvantage are usually based on economic criteria. The definition of the Hungarian education policy takes two main aspects into account: economic circumstances and parents educational level.

### **2.3 Ethnic aspect**

A large proportion of children belonging to the Roma ethnicity can be regarded as socially and economically disadvantaged, which is further reinforced during their school years: initial shortcomings accumulate in education. Kertesi and Kézdi (2005) stated that two thirds of Roma students were disadvantaged. The rate of educational failure among Roma children is not the result of one single problem but many. They are challenged by numerous difficulties in the Hungarian education system, resulting in unequal access to quality education. In the case of education, Roma children seem to have similar problems as non-Roma children of low social status. As a result, these issues are consequences of their social status rather than their minority status. This consequence had major effects on the sampling strategy of the present research as it was considered more important to concentrate on the socioeconomic circumstances than on the ethnicity of the children.

### **2.4 Aspects of language disadvantage**

This section describes the possible aspects of language disadvantage in contemporary Hungary focusing on children who speak a different mother tongue or a different language variety. Moreover, theories explaining the connection between language disadvantage and educational performance are described in detail using the ideas of Bernstein's sociolinguistic account of educational failure (1972) and Bourdieu's concept on the cultural capital (1973). Children from different social backgrounds have different levels of language competence, which may consecutively influence their later academic achievement. The significance of understanding the meaning of language and culture in families and its effect on classroom practices and educational attainment is underlined in the studies focusing on linguistic socialization (Heath, 1986; Réger, 1987; Levinson, 2007). Children coming from various sociocultural backgrounds bring with them a different set of communicative expectations and



interaction rules. These differences play an important role in teachers' expectations and as a result, in the learner's school performance. Moreover, differences in language and ways of communication also have important implications for literacy instruction.

## **2.5 The role of literacy**

The sociocultural approach sees literacy as an identity kit where the specific devices are "words, deeds, thoughts, values, actions, interactions, objects, tools, and technologies" (Gee, 2001, p. 36). Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at greater risk of having reading difficulties as a result of different experiences of literacy practices and activities. Language background at home influences not only children's language competence in class but also the development of reading skills and subsequent reading comprehension (Ginsborg, 2006). Low levels of literacy are likely to limit educational chances of children, and, consequently, will serve as a barrier in their future career, workplace advancement, welfare and life satisfaction. Literacy development seems to be a key issue in education, which also affects foreign language learning.

## **2.6 Motivation of disadvantaged children**

Studies investigating the impact of home background on motivation are reviewed. Parental involvement, parental values, positive parenting style and educational aspirations reinforce children's motivation to succeed and frame how children perform in school. Motivational studies concerning disadvantaged children in education are reviewed in international (Howse, Lange, Farran, and Boyles, 2003; Silliman, Butler and Wallach, 2003) and Hungarian context (Fejes and Józsa, 2005). Parents' effect is also present in modern conceptual models of motivation (Gardner, Masgoret and Tremblay, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005).

The role of home background in foreign language learning motivation are discussed in Kormos and Csizér (2005) and Csapó (2001), which indicate that the parents' role is even more decisive in terms of motivation than the teachers' role in foreign language learning.

## **2.7 Language pedagogy research of disadvantaged children**

Finally, language pedagogy issues of students with special needs and studies in the field of foreign language education of socially disadvantaged students are reviewed. Involving learners with special needs in foreign language education requires teachers trained in appropriate methodology. Most research studies in the area of foreign language teaching to children with special needs focus on dyslexia, which indicates the importance of this topic and the necessity of a deeper account of methodological considerations. New research directions in the field of teaching foreign languages to children with special needs indicate that the use of appropriate methods can greatly enhance the efficiency of language instruction.

## **3. Research Method**

### **3.1 Overview of research design**

The methodology applied in the present research arises from the aim to explore in depth the experience, views and perceptions of socially disadvantaged children and their teachers, and to collect data that is multi-layered, incorporating behaviour, opinion and emotion. My intention with the present research is to give a complex view of classrooms as both pedagogic and social encounters; therefore the three layers of this research correspond to three aspects of the learning process: that of the children, the foreign language teachers, and the head teachers, representing the wider institutional context.

### 3.2 Principles of qualitative research and their application to the present research

The complexity and multifaceted nature of education requires the use of different research techniques. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach towards investigating its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research is especially appropriate for school-based research as qualitative techniques “help to bridge the gulf between so-called pure, academic research and the everyday realities of teaching” (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p. 35).

As the interpretations and perspectives of the participants were the most important aims of the present research, the main research tool was interviewing. It helped to reveal the meaning that the teachers and children attach to their behaviour or to particular issues in language teaching. Experiences and viewpoints were described in detail during the interviews, which made it possible to get an *inside* knowledge of the language classes, which relates to the goal of qualitative research to get an *emic* perspective of the situation under investigation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for evaluating the quality of a piece of qualitative research are described in detail: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Furthermore, the researcher’s role and issues of triangulation are discussed. Triangulation was realized by using a range of research tools and strategies in order to obtain a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Methods triangulation, multiple data sources, theory triangulation and multi-site research helped to give a more complete picture of the phenomena.

Ethical and legal issues associated with the research involve data collection about sensitive issues, and problems of privacy and confidentiality are discussed.

### 3.3 Participants

In accordance with the principles of qualitative research, for the present investigation purposive sampling was used in order to get a sample which was in line with the theoretical framework of the study and could be regarded as rich in information relevant to the research questions. The present research focuses on rural primary schools situated in the micro region of *Jászberény* or *Jászság* named alternatively. The aim of sampling was to select villages the schools of which were attended by a considerable number of disadvantaged children. The most important sampling criteria supported by the theoretical considerations of the decisive factors of disadvantaged situation were educational level and unemployment of the parents. Education level refers to completed years of primary education and unemployment was determined by the rate of registered unemployment. Possible segregation processes (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2005) among public schools in larger towns due to the free choice school system of Hungary might have distorted the data considerably as the distribution of disadvantaged children in larger towns' schools is rather heterogeneous. This was an additional reason to eliminate larger towns where there are several primary schools from the research. In this way, ideal sites with a considerable number of disadvantaged children were ensured, which was confirmed by the school head teachers, teachers and school documents. Six schools from the most disadvantaged settlements of the region were selected.

The participants for the interviews included the head teachers ( $N=6$ ), the teachers of English ( $N=7$ ) and the teachers of German ( $N=8$ ) of the selected primary schools, and disadvantaged children ( $N=38$ ) in groups of 5-8 from Grades 4-8 in each focus group taught by the teachers interviewed. The classroom observation concentrated on the classes taught or attended by the teachers and children who were interviewed.

### **3.4 Instruments**

The present research combined in-depth interviews with observation. Interviewing allowed the researcher to understand underlying ideas behind the actions as it put the observed phenomena of classroom teaching into context. The steps of developing, validating and piloting the interview guides are discussed in detail.

### **3.5 Observation**

Classroom observation as a data collection technique was used additionally in order to gain realistic insights into teaching conditions, pedagogical processes and activities; and to get to know the population from within. The observations were conducted in an unstructured way, which is a typical approach in a qualitative inquiry (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Descriptive field notes were written concentrating on the setting, activities, and behaviour of participants.

### **3.6 Analysis and interpretation**

The written data of interview transcripts and observation field notes was coded through analytic induction and constant comparative methods detailed in Maykut and Morehouse (1994), which uses inductive logic to develop emerging themes and categories simultaneously from a mass of narrative data. The iterative pattern of category construction and coding involved several phases of analysis and aimed at enhancing the consistency of coding. Qualitative research requires rich descriptive evidence in order to enhance a deeper understanding of the investigated issue, which is provided by verbatim quotations from the interview transcripts.

#### **4. Major findings and implications**

The recorded interviews and the classroom observations highlighted a number of issues in terms of language education of disadvantaged children which were divided into six major categories. The major categories of the findings are the following: 1) characteristics of disadvantaged children, 2) language teachers' methodological considerations, 3) assessment practices, 4) attitude to foreign language learning and motivation, 5) group environment and 6) context of language teaching.

##### **4.1 Disadvantaged children in language classes**

The first important step of data interpretation was to find out how disadvantaged children are identified in language classes and which characteristics influence the process of language learning.

In spite of the intentions to provide integrated education and offer equal educational opportunities to all children, it was found that children's ethnicity contributed considerably to segregational processes in primary schools, which resulted in more or less segregated education in some of the schools in the sample. The process of school segregation described by Kertesi and Kézdi (2005) was supported by the respondents.

Integrating special needs learners, in particular, dyslexic children into language classes caused various problems for language teachers, mainly because of their unpreparedness and inexperience. Teachers' awareness of and accommodations to the special needs of dyslexic language learners were found to promote considerable success. An increase of differences among children was reported, which resulted in a heavier workload for teachers since taking individual differences properly into account became even more demanding.

Indications of segregation were observed at the school level concerning foreign language education. Even if a child's disadvantaged status or ethnicity was not the apparent

criterion for placement, a higher ratio of disadvantaged and special needs children were found among learners of German due to limitations of language choice. Limitations of language choice seem to affect both teachers and children. Furthermore, it exerts a powerful negative effect especially on children's motivation.

It is essential to recognize learners' weak and strong points in order to find appropriate tools and adjust teaching methodology to them. Children's strengths were related to verbality, musicality and acting skills, whereas their weaknesses consisted of a complexity of factors associated with home background, motivation, language and literacy disadvantage and cognitive abilities. Mother tongue deficiencies and poor reading skills seemed to have an important effect on children's foreign language performance. An important discrepancy was observed between difficulties of language learning perceived by the learners themselves and identified by the teachers. Both language teachers and children were asked to comment on the most problematic areas of foreign language learning. Major difficulties recognized by teachers were related to literacy (reading, translation, grammar), whereas children rather identified listening and speaking as areas in need of improvement.

#### **4.2 Methodological considerations of language teachers**

Investigating teachers' professional background revealed that pre-service training had failed to prepare them to cope with the unfavourable circumstances that surrounded special needs or disadvantaged children, and that there were only a few in-service training courses which were reported to have been useful. The teachers' methodological viewpoints and the observed classroom activities were analysed from the aspect of their potential to meet the goals of foreign language education of primary schools and to satisfy the needs of disadvantaged learners. A great part of the observed classroom activities failed to correspond to these principles as they focused mainly on reading and writing skills combined with

grammar and translation tasks which contradict the main recommendations for young learners. The use of communicative and auditive materials appeared to be neglected. This didactic approach fell short of exploiting children's strengths, moreover, it created inappropriate conditions for dyslexic learners. Instead of using an age-appropriate multisensory approach and various techniques of differentiation, teachers preferred teaching in homogeneous groups organized according to ability level, which proved to be particularly demotivating for disadvantaged learners. It was confirmed that incorporating the explicit teaching of learning strategies may be useful for disadvantaged learners whose home background did not equip them with efficient learning strategies. These findings highlight that children's characteristics and individual needs have to be recognized and catered for actively by the teacher if language learning is to be effective.

#### **4.3 Assessment practices**

Assessing young learners may have long-term consequences on the learning process because it influences children's self-esteem, their motivation, their attitude to language learning and their future performance considerably (McKay, 2006). In terms of assessment practices, forms of summative assessment were more frequent, in spite of the fact that formative assessment could draw attention to children's strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, giving meaningful, useful and motivating feedback was found to improve the subsequent learning processes. Classroom tests focused mostly on accuracy and proficiency, whereas forms of ipsative assessment, which could provide deeper attention to children's progress and promote their individual development, were rarely employed. Teacher's various attitudes to exemptions of dyslexic learners from assessment indicate that the purposes, advantages and usefulness of exemptions were not clear for them.



#### **4.4 Attitude to language learning and motivation**

In spite of the definite goals of language education in primary schools, relatively little emphasis was put on increasing the learners' motivation consciously. The qualitative data revealed several demotivating factors: the limitations of language choice, a negative attitude to schooling in general caused by the children's social context and home background, the teachers' use of demotivating classroom activities and the lack of motivating peers due to homogeneous grouping. Successful teachers attempted to foster children's instrumental motivation by highlighting utilitarian purposes and successful learners. More importantly, intrinsic motivation was promoted by offering children opportunities to engage in challenging, age-appropriate and personally relevant activities, which, at the same time, improved students' performance and prevented behaviour problems triggered by boredom or inappropriate levels of tasks. Disadvantaged children reported having modest intercultural contacts, which could not exert substantial positive impact on their motivation. Data suggest that the decrease in motivation around adolescence might be more significant for disadvantaged learners probably due to a conjunction of negative social and educational factors, which indicates that maintaining motivation over longer periods of time could be rather challenging for teachers.

#### **4.5 The role of group environment**

The learning environment is supposed to have an important effect on the results of language learning of children because long-term, sustained learning cannot take place unless it is provided by the appropriate educational context (Dörnyei, 2007). Supportive and positive relationships between teachers and children were found crucial from several aspects: it helped to create a motivating context for language teaching, it appeared to meet the emotional needs of disadvantaged children, moreover, it also reduced behaviour problems. Besides, firm, fair

and consistent classroom management was found successful in dealing with negative classroom behaviour, moreover, additional challenges were explained by the social and emotional changes of adolescence. In one institution, school-level measures were needed to overcome serious behaviour problems and to anticipate attrition.

#### **4.6 Context of language teaching**

The most significant contextual factor outside the school system was parental attitude to home support of learning. Several initiatives were reported which aimed at strengthening home-school cooperation, however, several efforts seemed to have failed. As far as the institutional context is concerned, the interprofessional and intraprofessional collaboration increased teachers' professional competence and efficacy greatly. Head teachers appeared to be particularly influential on the school climate. A latent negative approach to integration was found in several schools, which was strengthened by teachers' scepticism concerning educational reforms.

In sum, these findings indicate that the solution might be a responsive school environment "which views problems as challenges and not obstacles" (Corbett, 2001, p.14). The notions of learning failure and disability should be reconceptualized in order to create a supportive learning environment, which helps to overcome social and economic inequality.

The above mentioned components implicate the factors determining the processes of language learning, on the basis of which an emerging model of the language learning foreign language education can be outlined in the context of disadvantaged, rural primary schools. This model gives a multifaceted and reflexive picture considering the three perspectives of the respondents, moreover, it attempts to demonstrate the complexity and contextual contingency of interdependent factors. A tentative picture of this emerging model is provided in Figure 1 below.

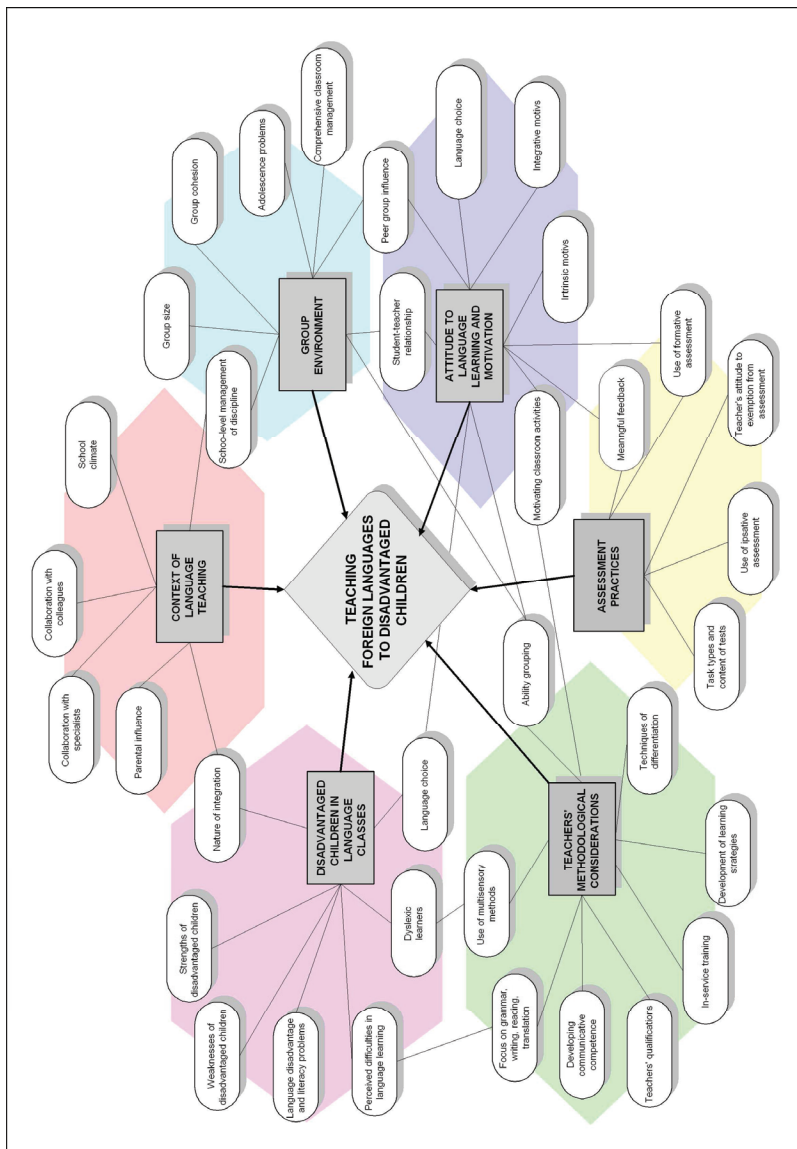


Figure 1. An emerging model of teaching foreign languages to disadvantaged learners

#### **4.7 Pedagogical implications**

The findings of the present research have considerable implications for teacher education in general and classroom practices of foreign language teaching. The majority of the presented findings can inform not only teachers involved in foreign language education, but also teachers of other fields. Moreover, the results from the present investigation might provide useful information to those involved in educational policy making or pre-service and in-service training program design.

The findings confirm the teacher education should equip trainees with appropriate means and tools to teach children with various needs. Future teachers should develop awareness and understanding of the complexity of learners' background from socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic or language aspect. Teacher education should provide teachers with knowledge about individual differences in terms of personal abilities and the effects of home background, which will enhance teachers' commitment to working in a society of diversity. A wider perspective of looking beyond the children of the classroom should be used to identify not only the negative, but also the positive cultural and social influences of the families.

It was found that teachers' knowledge about special educational needs and inclusion in relation to methodology and efficient practices should be enhanced. As far as language pedagogy is concerned, additional information in the area of language and communication, particularly dyslexia should be relevant. During the teaching practice, trainees should attempt working in an inclusive setting because "experiences with integration may enhance positive teacher feelings by increasing self-efficacy and professional satisfaction" (Pijl, Meijer and Hegarty, 1997, p.157).

The findings of the research have implications for language teachers which may help to produce better learning outcomes for disadvantaged children. It was confirmed that children could benefit substantially from reflective, culturally relevant and age-appropriate

instructional practices. Being familiar with explicit techniques for relating to students individually was found important by teachers. Classroom practices beneficial for disadvantaged learners involve tailoring classroom learning to the needs of children by exploiting children's verbal abilities and putting more focus on orality. New directions of pedagogy, such as multisensory methods, differentiated techniques, explicit teaching of learning strategies, project pedagogy or cooperative learning should be promoted in language learning.

#### **4.8 Future extension of the research**

As the present research has investigated the primary schools of a restricted geographical area, further research could look beyond this context to other disadvantaged locations in Hungary, extending the scope to other disadvantaged villages or involving disadvantaged schools of larger cities. This would offer useful data for identifying precise factors of children's background relating to disadvantage in education.

As the present research provided cross-sectional insights into the field of education of disadvantaged children, longitudinal research would be needed to determine whether the characteristics of disadvantaged children change over time and also which periods of development and which incidents of life are critical. Moreover, a more focussed investigation into intervention programs in terms of foreign language could provide useful information on good practices. In addition, there needs to be a consideration of how isolated local initiatives might develop and their results become implemented at different levels of education.

More research is needed in the field of teacher education, pre-service and in-service training. In-depth and comprehensive research could reveal the precise relationships of educational experiences and practice shock, the transition into teaching, as well as teachers' subsequent professional development. It could also clarify what kind of support and training

the teachers need and add details on how to attract and retain experienced and expert teachers in schools in disadvantaged regions.

This study focused on the institutional context of education, however, another area that warrants further research is exploring the perspectives of parents and home background in more detail. Further research could examine the role each parent plays in the children's school life more closely and through what mechanisms this affects children's academic performance. Interview studies or ethnographic research with parents of low socioeconomic status could offer deeper insight into their perceptions of schooling.

#### **4.9 Limitations**

The sample size, the geographical restrictions of the sample and time constraints caused limitations regarding the representativeness of the samples. Consequently, it cannot be guaranteed that the findings of this research can be generalized to a population. Although the main focus of data gathering was foreign language education, the findings may be applicable in a wider context. The data collected, by its very nature, could not provide a complete picture of the learning process; however, the presentation of the findings in the chapter will enable the reader to decide whether the results may be transferred to other situations of education.

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